“Woman Work”

I've got the children to tend  
The clothes to mend  
The floor to mop  
The food to shop  
Then the chicken to fry  
The baby to dry  
I got company to feed  
The garden to weed  
I've got shirts to press  
The tots to dress  
The cane to be cut  
I gotta clean up this hut  
Then see about the sick  
And the cotton to pick.  
  
Shine on me, sunshine  
Rain on me, rain  
Fall softly, dewdrops  
And cool my brow again.  
  
Storm, blow me from here  
With your fiercest wind  
Let me float across the sky  
'Til I can rest again.  
  
Fall gently, snowflakes  
Cover me with white  
Cold icy kisses and  
Let me rest tonight.  
  
Sun, rain, curving sky  
Mountain, oceans, leaf and stone  
Star shine, moon glow  
You're all that I can call my own.

Maya Angelou

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AP English

Poem Explication

“Woman Work” by Maya Angelou is about a woman who is overwhelmed with all of her housework and wants to take a break. She is tired of doing housework and thinking about nature comforts her. The main theme of “Woman Work” is work. The woman does everyday tasks that women are expected to do, such as, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children. “Woman Work” uses masculine rhymes, tone, and metaphors to convey the woman’s feelings of discontent.

Using masculine rhymes in the first stanza works to convey the woman’s emotions. A masculine rhyme is a rhyme in which the sounds only involve one syllable. The last word in each line of the first stanza rhymes with the last word in the next line. In lines one and two the words “tend” and “mend” rhyme, and in lines thirteen and fourteen the words “cut” and “hut” rhyme. Having seven masculine rhymes in the first stanza makes the poem flow much better and makes the poem more enjoyable to read. Besides making the poem sound better, the masculine rhymes give the poem a sense of repetition. All the rhymes work together in expressing what the woman has to do every day. The rhymes bring to life the large amount of work that the woman has to do in her home. Another effectual literary device in “Woman Work” is tone.

Tone is the most effective way for the woman to express her feeling of exhaustion, and it is clear that she is not happy about all of the tasks she has to do. Her tone in the first stanza is not angry but somewhat frustrated. Tone is revealed in her diction in the first stanza. She uses phrases like “I’ve got” and “I gotta,” which show that if she had the choice to do something else, she wouldn’t spend her day working at home (lines1, 12). The tone of the second stanza is hopeful. The woman asks for the sun to shine on her and the rain to fall on her. She is hoping for a time when she can go outside and relax. Line eighteen says “And cools my brow again,” which shows that it has been a long time since she has been able to go outside and enjoy nature (18). The woman’s tone from line fifteen to line thirty is optimistic because she is visualizing what she could do if she was not working all day (15-30). She uses words like “gently”, (22) “rest” (23) “curving sky” (27) and “moon glow” (29). These words show that she is searching for relaxation. In line twenty-three, she says, “Fall gently, snowflakes.” Creating a scene of gently falling snowflakes creates a feeling of respite. Comparing her tone in the first stanza to the tone of the rest of the poem shows that she wants something different than what she is doing at the beginning of the poem. The woman seems stressed and overwhelmed in the beginning. Her tone in the last few stanzas is more hopeful. Although her tone does change during the poem, both tones convey a sense of discontent and unhappiness. The woman’s tone and metaphors make her emotions clear.

The metaphors depict the woman’s desire to rest in the last four stanzas. In the third stanza she says “Storm, blow me from here” (19). The storm she mentions is a metaphor for her freedom as she desperately wants to get out of her current situation. In line twenty-one she says,” Let me float across the sky,” which is another metaphor for freedom, and also for relaxation. The fourth stanza depicts a scene of the woman in the snow. The scene uses sensual imagery and it is also a metaphor for respite. The metaphors in the poem are situations the woman has created to take her mind off of her work. She is dissatisfied with her life and she feels that she could be doing more with her time.

“Woman Work” uses several literary devices, but the rhyming, tone, and metaphors are the most powerful in expressing the woman’s emotions. This poem is not long, but in so many ways it reveals the narrator’s feelings and her yearning for rest. The way her emotions are displayed is done very well. The masculine rhymes in the first stanza make the poem fun to read, the tone has a lot of emotion, and the metaphors are creative. This work of literature is important because it makes you think about how much work stay-at-home parents do and it helps us appreciate the we have to do leisurely activities.

Work Cited

Angelou, Maya. “Woman Work.” Perrine’s Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense. Pages 832Boston, MA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006.



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AP English Literature and Composition

Reflection for Poem Explication

I got a forty-three out of fifty on my poem explication on “Woman Work.” The major problems with my paper were in my introduction and making mistakes in my lower order concerns. I fixed my introduction by making it clear that the kind of work the woman does is work that is done usually by females. On the second page, I made a mistake involving commas and I used passive voice.

I also had to fix my second paragraph. I made a few comments that were not relevant to the theme and got a bit off-topic. I corrected these mistakes by taking out the irrelevant points and connecting what made sense back to the theme. I can fix this problem in the future by looking over my work again and making sure that everything my paper goes with the theme and the prompt of the paper. In the third paragraph I put words in quotations that I wanted to talk about instead of quoting an entire sentence from the poem. I made this mistake because I didn’t think I could quote more than one line from a poem. In the future, I will make sure to quote longer passages so my quotations make more sense. On the last page I underlined periods and spaces in my work cited entry. I can fix this problem but double-checking it and by referring to the research guide online.

I am doing a better job in using passive voice. I usually have a few 9.3 skills pages to do, but on this paper I only had to do one. One thing I continually need to revise in my use of commas. I can fix this issue by reading my papers out loud and checking to see if I have enough commas.